

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

a. Project Title: Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge Land Acquisition -- Acquisition of Two Key Properties within the Refuge Project Boundary

Applicant Name: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

b. Project Description and Primary Biological/Ecological Objectives

Project Description: This proposal requests \$3,436,500 to acquire fee title interest in two properties (*called Property #1 and Property #2 in this funding proposal*), totaling 658 acres located in the core of the Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) project boundary in Sacramento County. The owners of both properties are willing sellers who have requested appraisals by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Service) and are keen to work with the Service on fee title acquisition. Both properties offer outstanding potential for floodplain management and wildlife habitat restoration and enhancement. Each is adjacent to land that is already owned and managed by the Service as part of Stone Lakes NWR. The properties are strategically located within the Sacramento/San Joaquin River Delta and the Cosumnes/Mokelumne Rivers Basin. *These properties are extremely high priority acquisitions.* There is intense pressure to convert land in the Stone Lakes Basin to vineyards, which offer little habitat for wildlife. There is a high likelihood that these properties will be sold to others if the Service is not able to act quickly.

Primary Biological/Ecological Objectives: Acquisition of the two properties will contribute to Stone Lakes NWR goals by protecting, restoring, and expanding tidal and seasonal wetlands, lakes, riparian corridors, and upland habitats to benefit native fish, migratory birds, and numerous special-status plant and wildlife species, such as the Delta smelt, Sacramento splittail, valley elderberry longhorn beetle, giant garter snake, western pond turtle, bald eagle, and Swainson's hawk. It will prevent a potential conversion to vineyards (Property #1) and allow habitat restoration of existing vineyard land (Property #2). Restoring the historic configuration of South Stone Lake will expand the Beach/Stone Lakes Basin floodplain and increase flood storage capacity. These two strategically-located proposed acquisitions complement CALFED's mission of restoring ecological health in the northern reaches of the Delta. Each supports CALFED's objectives of providing good water quality for beneficial uses and improving/increasing aquatic and terrestrial habitats and improving ecological functions in the Bay-Delta.

c. Approach/Tasks/Schedule

Both landowners would like to sell fee title interest in their entire property in a single transaction. The amount requested in this proposal represents fair market value for the properties as supported by comparable sales data. Appraisals for the two properties should be completed by September; offers will be made to the landowners within 60 days. Once the Service and the owners reach an agreement, the Sacramento Realty Office staff anticipates that closure can be completed within 60 days of receiving a signed offer, or by early 1999.

d. Justification for Project and Funding by CALFED

Acquisition of these two properties can help improve the health of the Bay-Delta ecosystem and the Cosumnes/Mokelumne Rivers floodplain, will benefit several high risk species and habitats, and will yield broad ecosystem benefits. The properties offer restoration potential for many species at risk, including the Delta Smelt, Sacramento splittail, Swainson's hawk, bald eagle, American peregrine falcon, Aleutian Canada goose, giant garter snake, valley elderberry longhorn beetle, western pond turtle, California hibiscus, vernal pool species, such as the tadpole fairy shrimp, and many neotropical migratory songbirds. South Stone Lake, Snodgrass Slough, and

other perennial waters sources offer ideal reintroduction sites for Sacramento perch. Tidally-influenced areas currently support Delta smelt and Sacramento splittail and can be expanded.

e. Budget Costs and Third Party Impacts

The Service is requesting \$3,436,500 to fully acquire both properties. Anticipated third party impacts to the local tax base by withdrawal of these lands will be off-set by the Refuge Revenue Sharing Act; payments in lieu of taxes will be reimbursed to the communities annually.

f. Applicant Qualifications

Sacramento Realty Office: The Service currently manages over 670 square miles of habitat within the National Wildlife Refuge system in California. The Service has an ongoing land acquisition program for 16 refuges and wildlife management areas within the Central Valley and San Francisco Bay Delta. The Sacramento Realty Office's staff of eight, which has over 150 years of combined experience in appraisal and realty support, will coordinate the acquisition process.

Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Staff: Following acquisition, the Stone Lakes NWR staff will coordinate restoration work with Ducks Unlimited, which has a long track record of habitat restoration projects. The Stone Lakes NWR staff currently manages nearly 1,000 acres of Service-owned land within the Refuge project area. The Refuge is also pursuing cooperative agreements with a number of State and local agencies for 5,200 acres of non-Service lands within the boundary. The Service has expended \$3.5 million of Federal, State, and private funds to acquire lands from four willing sellers and has obtained over \$1 million for the restoration, enhancement, and management of Refuge lands.

g. Monitoring and Data Evaluation

This project will be tracked through the Service's Sacramento Realty Office from initiation through purchase. Stone Lakes NWR will provide biological support for the acquisition process and oversee all restoration and management.

h. Local Support and cost sharing

The Stone Lakes NWR land protection program has won support from many legislators, public officials, agencies, non-profit organizations, businesses, and constituency groups. Funds for Refuge land acquisition projects are also being sought from the Land and Water Conservation Fund and other sources. Land transfers are pending from two state agencies.

Compatibility with CALFED objectives

This project is consistent with CALFED'S Ecosystem Restoration Program Plan objectives, complies with relevant laws and regulations, including NEPA/CEQA, will not prejudice CALFED's long term program, and involves only willing sellers.

Coordination with Other Programs

Acquisition and subsequent restoration of these two properties supports the goals and objectives of the Recovery Plan for Sacramento, San Joaquin Native Fishes, the Service's Central Valley San Francisco Bay Ecoregion Plan, Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture, USFWS Concept Plan for Waterfowl Wintering Habitat Preservation, Aleutian Canada Goose Recovery Plan, North American Waterfowl Management Plan, and the goals of Stone Lakes NWR.